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## GENERAL JOFFRE

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# GENERAL JOFFRE

BY  
A FRENCH GUNNER

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## FOREWORD

“WHERE is the danger that now confronts us?” once asked Sir John Brunner, seconding a resolution for the reduction of armaments. He conscientiously scanned the political horizon through his own particular glasses, and failed to detect any cause for alarm. For years past we have been told by well-meaning but ill-informed optimists that the world was becoming more humane, that the “international solidarity of labour” had killed the war spirit, and that it was nothing short of folly each year to waste millions of money upon ever-growing armaments, which were never likely to be required.



In England, in France, and in Belgium, more than anywhere else in Europe, philosophers and politicians, idealists and socialists, have fought strenuously to render possible a limitation if not an actual reduction of armaments; they have been untiring in their efforts to spread and in their zeal to preach the admirable but humanly unattainable gospel of universal and everlasting peace among men.

Nothing is easier to believe than what we ardently wish to be true. Both in England and in France, most people believed up till the last moment that a great European War was impossible; it had seemed imminent more than once, but means had invariably been found to avert the catastrophe, and most of us comforted ourselves with the thought that a European War would be so appalling nowadays, its consequences so terrible

and so far-reaching, that it was indeed unthinkable.

Yet, all the time, silently but relentlessly Germany was ever adding to her numbers and her power; feverishly casting more guns and ever more formidable guns; grimly piling up stores of ammunition beyond anything ever known in history or ever dreamed of in foreign chancellories. Then, when the day of his own naming had come, when the hour of his own choosing had struck, when every preparation had been perfected and victory awaited but his bidding, the War Lord flung aside the mask, his bloody sword flew out of its scabbard, and the most gigantic, the most highly disciplined, and the most scientifically equipped army that ever was gathered upon earth was hurled reeling across luckless Belgium on to unsuspecting France.

The German plan of a swift invasion of France, capturing Paris within three weeks of the beginning of hostilities and terrorising the rest of the country into submission, and then hurrying back the whole mass of the terrible war machine towards the East, there to strike the slow-moving Russian hosts, such a plan was not only feasible, but had every prospect of success, provided that the invader could choose, as he did, his own time, and that the invaded provinces were, as in fact they happened to be, unprepared.

That such was their plan the Germans had taken little trouble to keep secret, so sure were they of their strength and so certain of an overwhelming victory. But if there was only one man in France to know the German plan and to realise its menace, it was he who as far back

as 1911 had assumed the entire responsibility of guarding *le doux pays de France* and of saving her fair bosom from the ruthless hoofs of the devastating German hordes. He who had accepted such a tremendous task knew, better even than the German General Staff, that Lille, La Fère, Laon and Reims were no longer the fortified places which they were represented to be on military maps; he knew that, owing to false economy and criminal waste, their fortifications were obsolete and their magazines empty. And whilst he must have known full well the various weak points in the armour of the French frontier, he could not have known, nor even dared to anticipate, the heroic defence of Liège nor the immediate and invaluable help that he was to receive from England.

Who is this man who dared to

accept such a trust and was found worthy of it when the day of trial dawned? Who is he that foiled the German plan, and saved from Prussian militarism our Western civilisation? Who is he, this Commander-in-Chief, to whose genius it is mainly due that the forces of Great and Greater Britain, of Belgium, of France and of her Colonies, have not spent their courage nor given their blood in vain, fighting together in close union without confusion and with such telling effect? His name was all but unknown a few months ago; to-day there is none more justly honoured throughout the civilised world, none more greatly feared throughout the Germanic world: his name is Joffre.

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# GENERAL JOFFRE

## CHAPTER I

### BIRTHPLACE AND EARLY YEARS

BORN at Rivesaltes on January 12th, 1852, Joseph Jacques Césaire Joffre is only a few months Sir John French's senior. Fairly tall and particularly broad, his figure is more massive than elegant. His head is large, his hair is thick and wavy, golden threads still shining in the mass of silvery grey. His keen eyes are deep-set and may be called either blue or grey; they are remarkably mobile and expressive, as searching as cold steel one minute and sparkling with Gallic wit



the next. His grey eyebrows are unusually long and bushy; his forehead wide and somewhat *bombé*; his nose straight and fully developed; his mouth large, and his lips are rather thick, but partially hidden beneath a heavy moustache, which once was fair but is now nearly white. His lower jaw is powerful, but not brutal; his chin is round and clean shaven, except for a *mouche* just below the under lip. His short neck and broad shoulders give to his personality an appearance of greater strength than distinction, but his *bonhomie* and kindliness of manner add a real charm, an irresistible fascination, to the face of a clever, a strong, a kind, and, above all, an essentially manly man.

Rivesaltes, General Joffre's birth-place, is in the extreme south of France, but the General is not a Méridional. Altitude has far more

influence than latitude upon races of men or species of plants. Whatever the clime, the hillmen differ from the dwellers in the plain, just as the vines which grace the rocky slopes of the Pyrenees yield a very different and more excellent wine than can ever be obtained from vines grown in the rich plains of the Aude. To the Méridional or Southerner proper, there is no sweeter music than his own voice ; he loves to talk and to gesticulate, and his eloquence is equalled only by his imagination.

But General Joffre loves work above words, and fastidious exactitude more than the most poetical of images. He talks little and speaks slowly without gesticulation ; at the same time, he in no way deserves the epithet of taciturn, unjustly bestowed upon him by some professional babblers. He is not taciturn, but only talks when

he has something to say ; in other words, he is typically a "hillman," a "doer," ever active in body and mind, naturally born to boldly face and overcome difficulties, revelling in taking risks and "getting there" whatever the fatigue that may result, whatever the effort that may be necessary, whatever pains it may cost.

Mountains and the sea are Nature's two greatest training-schools, where men are taught not to fear, but to conquer danger. One usually finds amongst the hills men who are more typical of their race ; it is so in Wales and in the Highlands of Scotland, in the Savoy Alps, in the Basque Country, and upon the westernmost slopes of the Pyrenees, where the huge granite wall which stands between France and Spain reaches the shores of the blue Mediterranean in a succession of ever-lessening hills, as if the

great rocky barrier had been hacked away or worn down by men in their passage from one land to the other.

It is at this juncture that Rivesaltes stands, a picturesque townlet of some 6,000 inhabitants, which is reached by a bridge over 160 yards in length, spanning a deep ravine; it is surrounded by fair vineyards, more extensive and certainly of greater fame than all the other vineyards in the Pyrenees: as far back as the thirteenth century the Grenache wine from Rivesaltes had acquired a European reputation; and its rich Malmsey wines were shipped to England during the sixteenth century. Forming the easiest natural land route between Spain and the rest of the Continent, the old Province of Roussillon, in which Rivesaltes is situated, was civilised long before the advent of the Romans, by the Sardones, Con-

sorrani, and Ceretani; the Roman occupation followed, lasting over four centuries, before the commencement of the irresistible flow of northern tribes trekking southwards, Gauls, Alains, Vandals, Visigoths, and the rest; then, with the ebbing human tide came the Moors, whose stay in Roussillon was longer than anywhere else north of the Pyrenees.

In more modern times, Roussillon was almost continually under the sceptre of the Kings of Aragon until the year 1659, when the treaty of the Pyrenees added this fair province to the domain of France.

Lazily basking in the Mediterranean sun, her back turned to the great snow-capped mountain peaks and her face towards the gay, sparkling sea, old Rivesaltes smiles gravely on, and is quietly but truly proud of her son.

The dogged determination of the Catalan mulcteer, the quick eye and resourceful mind of the mountaineer, the ready wit of the Gaul, the kindly heart of the Latin, and an intelligence entirely his own, such are some of the natural gifts of General Joffre.

From an early age Joffre evinced an extraordinary facility for mathematics; figures and formulæ had for him as much fascination as marbles and sweets had for his playmates, who always thought it rather uncanny that he should so easily grasp and solve what seemed to them the most intricate problems. In 1868, when only sixteen years of age, he was able to enter the *École Polytechnique*, the famous French preparatory school for both civil and military engineers. Two years later, when war broke out and the Germans

invested Paris, young Joffre was given an emergency commission as lieutenant and a post in one of the siege batteries hastily formed for the defence of the capital against the dreaded foe already at its gates.

After the war young Joffre gave up his commission as a gunner, returned to the *École Polytechnique* to complete his course of studies, and left the following year, in 1872, with the rank of lieutenant, attached to the 2<sup>e</sup> *Régiment du Génie*, or Engineers. The first task entrusted to the young sapper was connected with the new Paris fortifications. He was only twenty and he lived in Paris, but the great city, its pleasures, intrigues, and attractions of all sorts never distracted the young lieutenant from the task which had been given him, and that which he had set up for himself. If many men are shirkers, there are

many too who do their duty, but there are few who systematically and invariably do more than their duty ; Joffre belongs to this *élite*. His marvellous ability to manipulate figures rapidly and accurately, his thorough knowledge of the higher mathematics, his logical mind and great common sense, and above all his devotion to work, were not only noticed, but turned to good account by his seniors, and soon secured him a foremost place among his fellow-officers.

In 1876 Maréchal de MacMahon, who was then President of the Republic, made a personal and thorough inspection of the work already accomplished by the officers entrusted with the remodelling and strengthening of the Paris defences. This distinguished soldier and chief magistrate of the State having viewed the forts



in course of construction, and asked many a pertinent question respecting the merits of the divers plans then under consideration, turned to a squarely built, unassuming sapper, a young *Lieutenant du Génie*, and said in his typically abrupt manner: "I congratulate you, Captain Joffre." To be promoted captain "on the field" in time of peace and at the age of twenty-four was both a great honour and a splendid acknowledgment of young Joffre's worth, and never was honour more justly deserved nor more modestly borne.

## CHAPTER II

### EXPERIENCES IN THE FAR EAST

YEAR after year the captain worked on, continuing and perfecting the work of the lieutenant, drawing plans, making endless calculations of angles, distances, resistance, etc., shovelling up earth, digging away, building and tunnelling, silently but persistently, with grim determination and unerring judgment, until all that could humanly be done to make Paris impregnable had been done and well done.

Then, and only then, did Captain Joffre look up from the books over which he had pored during well-nigh twenty years and no page of which now held knowledge which he had

not made also his own. For the first time since his early school days he listened to the call of the great, haughty Pyrenees; his nostrils quivered as the chill Tramontane blew from the ragged peaks, his pulse beat faster and his eyes grew moist as they lovingly dwelt upon the boundless blue sea which he saw from his native hills and beyond which were great mountains, strange peoples, and a beautiful world as yet unknown to him. His work was done; he threw down the axe and the spade, and decided that he too should see the world and venture upon the sea.

This was in 1884, at a time when France was ringing with the exploits of Admiral Courbet, who was adding to the already important colonial domain of France the vast territories of Cambodia, Annam, Cochin-China, and Tonkin.

In order to force the Chinese Government to accept France's terms, it had been decided to occupy Formosa, then a flourishing island with a population of over three and a half million inhabitants. Kelung, the chief city, was accordingly bombarded and a landing effected. But the French had under-estimated the power of the enemy. Formosa had a garrison of about 20,000 men, and there were at Kelung a number of modern guns mounted by Krupp. It soon became evident that the island could not be seized by merely landing parties from Courbet's ships, and reinforcements were sent from France. It was Captain Joffre's chance to go and see the East; he seized it, and landed in Formosa early in 1885, not long before peace was signed between China and France. He did not return to France, however,

until after three years, which were spent mostly in Tonkin, at Hanoi, as *Chef du Génie*, or Officer in Command of the Engineers.

His chief care and concern during those three years was the welfare of the men of the Expeditionary Force who were sent from France to a hostile land where the roads were bad and the climate worse, and where little accommodation existed for the housing of the troops. Bringing to bear upon the problem confronting him his usual common sense and thoroughness, Joffre first of all erected temporary shelters sufficient for immediate requirements; he then made himself conversant with the way barracks were built and the purpose they served both in India and Java, knowing much himself, but always ready to learn more; then, having also given due consideration to the question

of the peculiar climate of Tonkin, he was able to devise for the French Expeditionary Force in the Far East a system of housing which was practically perfect. Once his mind was made up as to the best model to adopt, the barracks were put up under his direction so quickly, and afforded the men such effective protection against both heat and damp, that many valuable lives were saved which would otherwise have been claimed by malaria or enteric. The invaluable services which Captain Joffre rendered at Hanoi were acknowledged at the time by the award of the cross of *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur*.

In 1888 Captain Joffre returned home, and received his majority the following year on May 6th, 1889, being gazetted as Commandant and appointed to a staff office at the

*Cabinet du Directeur du Génie*, at the War Office in Paris. Soon after, he left Paris for Versailles where he was appointed Major to the 5th Regiment or Railway Corps of the *Génie*. There it was that he acquired so much of his practical knowledge of French railways, and of the use to which they could be put for mobilisation purposes and the rapid massing of troops at any given point.

On April 7th, 1891, he was appointed *Professeur de Fortification*, or Lecturer on the art and science of fortification, at the famous Artillery Finishing School for officers, the *École d'Application*, at Fontainebleau. The lectures which he delivered during the eighteen months he remained at Fontainebleau were and still remain quite remarkable. Possessing the rare gift of clear and forcible expression, he proved to be an excellent teacher,

and all who knew him and appreciated his worth were anxious that he should remain in France and give the younger generation of officers the benefit of his extensive knowledge of military science. But Major Joffre hankered after new horizons; he had seen the East, and he was anxious to know something of the great and mysterious Black Continent.



## CHAPTER III

### WORK IN THE SUDAN

FRANCE'S immense African domain consists chiefly of the highly prosperous northern territories from Tunis to Morocco, the hinterland of which forms French Sudan. Upon the western coast of Africa France possesses valuable colonies, which are, from north to south, Senegal or Senegambia, French Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Dahomey, and French Congo. To effectively link up these colonies with Algeria, to establish safe and direct land communications between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, to open them up to commerce and civilisation, and to render possible the normal development of the immense wealth at present lying dormant within

the boundless plains, plateaux, and forests of Central Africa, watered by the rivers Senegal, Niger, and Congo—such was the high ambition of the pioneers of the French African Empire, and such is the tremendous task which their successors have boldly undertaken.

Forced to retire ever farther inland to more inaccessible regions, the unruly tribes, who lived by pillage, rapine, and the slave traffic, were a perpetual menace and a source of grave danger to the peaceful native population of the interior, who rightly claimed France's protection as the price of their loyalty. To reach these raiders and to inflict upon them losses to inspire them with a wholesome fear of French arms was no easy task, and before it could be accomplished the thirsty sands of the sun-scorched desert drank deep of the noblest

blood of France. More difficult still, even if less brilliant than the soldier's, was the engineer's task, which was to render definite, beneficial, and profitable such land as the sword had conquered.

From an early date it had been realised that the best means of making her influence felt, her power acknowledged, and her "peace" effective, would be for France to build an important system of railways in northern and western Africa. Before undertaking the construction of the immense main line across the Sahara, which is some day to run from Algiers to Brazzaville, it was deemed advisable to build as quickly and economically as possible shorter lines which would drain most of the trade from the interior towards one or more of the five outlets which France possesses upon the Atlantic.

As far back as 1863, General Faidherbe had recommended the construction of a line to connect the two rivers, Senegal and Niger. His idea was adopted in 1879 by the French Government, who sent to Senegambia a mission, headed by Captain Gallieni (to-day Governor of Paris), to report upon the feasibility of the plan.

It was soon afterwards decided that a railway should be built from Kayes, on the River Senegal, to Bammako, on the River Niger. Grants, which were insufficient owing to the great distance of Kayes from the sea, the hostility of the Blacks, and the lack of native labour, were voted annually in the French Parliament, whilst the unfortunate engineers responsible for the construction of the line were incessantly reminded that they had to cover the ground quickly in order to reach their goal before the British

and German lines which were then being constructed in neighbouring Colonies could be completed.

Foolish parsimony and excessive haste lead to disaster. After a few years many miles of line had been laid hastily and badly through inadequately surveyed and exceedingly difficult country, the inevitable consequence being utter chaos, threatening to result in the entire collapse of the undertaking.

Then it was that Major Joffre was sent to Senegal. The work that awaited him was so gigantic as to be disheartening: it appealed to him. The problem which confronted him seemed insoluble: it fascinated him!

On September 21st, 1892, Major Joffre was placed "*hors cadres*" and "*à la disposition de l'Administration des Colonies pour diriger une mission au Soudan*"—in other words, the

War Office was lending to the Colonial Office its best engineer.

Little did Joffre think as he landed upon Dakar's busy quay in December 1892 that he would soon be called upon to take over the command of a punitive expedition which was to prove the mathematician, the professor, the silent, hard-working sapper to be also a brilliant soldier, a keen fighter, and an admirable leader of men.

During the whole of the year 1893 Major Joffre was lost sight of; he was actively engaged in setting his house in order far away in the swamps of the Upper Senegal. His cool common sense did marvels; his vast knowledge of railway engineering and his devotion to work did the rest. He surveyed the all-important section of the line from Kita to Bammako which was then meant to be the terminus

of the line on the Niger, with the result that when the time came for laying the permanent way, the work was done more easily and yet better than had been the case before. Short as was Joffre's stay upon the scene, it is nevertheless largely due to his influence that the Senegal-Niger Railway is to-day an assured success and a paying undertaking instead of the miserable failure it very nearly became in 1892.

Towards the end of 1893 Colonel Bonnier had left Segou, on the Niger, with a small flotilla, and had reached Timbuctu on January 10th, 1894, hoisting the French flag on the citadel of that important centre of Trans-Sahara commerce and activity. His little force had been attacked on the way by Touaregs from both banks of the Niger and from the numerous islands formed by the flood waters of

the river, but he had inflicted upon them such severe punishment that most of the peaceful agricultural tribes of the river-side had hailed him as their deliverer and had at once placed themselves under the protection of France.

In order to make the happy results of Colonel Bonnier's expedition more far-reaching and permanent, it had been decided that a larger force than it had been possible to embark in the flotilla should follow by land; and Major Joffre, who happened to be then on the Niger, was asked to take command of this column and to conduct it from Segou to Timbuctu, where Colonel Bonnier would await him.

This expedition consisted of 14 French and 2 native officers, 28 French and 352 Native non-commissioned officers and men, about 200 pack horses and mules, and some 700



native carriers. Joffre's instructions were to follow the left bank of the river from opposite Segou to Timbuctu. The tribes of the river-side were friendly; they would welcome him and supply him with the food and forage he required for his troop; those native chiefs who had not yet made their submission were to be invited to join the column and to come to Timbuctu, where Colonel Bonnier would receive them. The expedition was to leave at the end of December; it should reach Timbuctu within three weeks, and Joffre would then return directly to Kayes, there to resume his important duties in connection with the railway in course of construction.

Leaving Segou on December 27th, 1893, Major Joffre and his party reached Timbuctu on February 12th, 1894. The unusually protracted floods of the Niger had forced them

to follow a much longer and more difficult route than had been anticipated; the population of some villages on the way had been distinctly hostile, and the necessary supplies had often to be taken by force or cunning; the Touaregs had on several occasions attacked the expedition with great daring: in fact none of the previsions of the marching orders had been realised. It was only when nearing Timbuctu that Major Joffre learnt that Colonel Bonnier and most of his men had been surprised and murdered by the Touaregs at Tacou-bao early in January, a feat which had emboldened all the fighting tribes once more to take up arms, and had shaken the confidence of the agricultural population in France's ability to protect them. The position was assuredly grave and might even have been described as critical.

Without waiting for orders or instructions from the authorities at home, Joffre at once abandoned all idea of returning to his railway plans at Kayes. As senior officer present, he assumed command at Timbuctu and lost no time in taking such measures as would enable him to deal a crushing blow to the 'Touaregs and restore confidence among the peaceful population before dissatisfaction had had time to spread. How rapidly and thoroughly he succeeded in achieving this double object is evidenced by the fact that six months later the fighting tribes had been practically annihilated and the inhabitants of Timbuctu and of the river-side districts were at last free from all danger of pillage and rapine; relays had been established; communications were safe; the whole country was peaceful and loyal, and

prosperity was soon to return to those hitherto desolated regions.

The rapidity and thoroughness of the work accomplished by Joffre on the banks of the Niger are only less admirable than the care he took of the lives and of the health of his men. During six consecutive months of incessant guerilla warfare, under the most trying climatic conditions, there were only two natives who died of fever and one French sergcant who was slightly wounded. Full as are the pages of Africa's history of stirring tales of heroism, daring, courage, endurance, and patience, one seeks in vain for such another example of the genius of man having accomplished so much at so little cost.

Needless to say, the action of Major Joffre in assuming command at Timbuctu was endorsed by the Governor of the French Sudan. The authorities

at home approved of it also, and their appreciation of his conduct was publicly acknowledged by the gazetting of his name as Lieutenant-Colonel on March 6th, 1894.

## CHAPTER IV

### MADAGASCAR

AFTER two years of incessant and peculiarly trying work in the Sudan, Lieutenant-Colonel Joffre returned to France, and on March 23rd, 1895, was appointed Secretary to a learned body known as the *Commission d'Examen des Inventions intéressant les Armées de Terre et de Mer*—a Committee of experts and scientists whose mission consists in the examination of the claims of inventors and of the merits of all inventions and discoveries likely to be of use to and to add to the efficiency of France's land and sea forces.

Joffre retained this important post

four and a half years, during which time he was in constant and immediate touch with the latest developments of modern science. He thus gained a considerable and unique insight into modern means and methods of warfare, as well as a vast store of technical knowledge which undoubtedly proved invaluable to him when, a little later on, he assumed the task of fitting France for the stupendous conflict that was to decide her destinies.

On August 3rd, 1897, Joffre was promoted to the rank of Colonel, but, contrary to the usual practice, he was not given the command of a regiment until two years later, his services being deemed more valuable at the post which he was so well qualified to occupy at the *Commission des Inventions*.

On November 10th, 1899, he was

gazetted Officer Commanding the 5th, or Railway, Regiment of *Génie* at Versailles; but his old regiment was not to have the honour of being commanded by him—Colonel Joffre was more urgently needed elsewhere. On December 23rd, 1899, he was again placed “*hors cadres*” and “*mis à la disposition du Ministre des Colonies pour être employé à Diego Suarez (Madagascar)*.” Once more was the War Office lending to the Colonial Secretary its best engineer.

Madagascar, as regards its size, natural wealth, and position, is one of France’s most valuable possessions, and, as such, deserves to be well defended. By the terms of the treaty signed in 1885 with the Hova Government, France acquired absolute rights over the territory of Diego Suarez, in the extreme north of the island. The bay or bays of



Diego Suarez form an ideal anchorage where the fleets of the world could gather and where they would find plenty of room, plenty of water, and ample protection from the worst weather that ever raged in the Indian Ocean. The largest bay is over four miles long and six miles wide, and there are four other smaller bays capable of accommodating all the shipping ever likely to seek shelter in those waters. As a naval base for the French Fleet, Diego Suarez is admirably situated, practically half-way between France and her Far Eastern possessions, and it was accordingly decided to erect important fortifications in order to render the anchorage as safe from the attack of man as it naturally was from the fury of the elements.

Nothing, however, or next to nothing, was attempted during the years

which followed the occupation of the northern part of the island, owing to the vacillating policy of successive administrations. The failure of the Hova Government to fulfil its obligations after the treaty of 1885, and a series of outrages perpetrated in the island against French residents led to the important military expedition of 1894-5, and eventually, in August 1896, to the formal annexation of Madagascar. It was then decided to send out, as Governor of the new Colony, General Gallieni, and he within two years of his arrival succeeded in pacifying the whole island and in laying foundations upon which its progress and prosperity have been firmly established and have continued to grow ever since.

The question of Diego Suarez and its defences was then once more brought to the notice of Parliament ;

it was argued that Madagascar had become a far more valuable asset than it was in 1885, and that it was still practically undefended. The Government of the day realised the force of the argument and the necessity for acting promptly and thoroughly; it was agreed that the work should begin at once and be entrusted to the most capable man in the Service, so that no more time should be lost, and that the contemplated fortifications of Diego Suarez should be equal to the importance of the position. That was why Colonel Joffre was asked to go to Madagascar and to give to the colonial Administration the benefit of his unequalled knowledge of all technical and practical questions of fortifications.

Colonel Joffre went out early in 1900, and, under his masterful guidance, a system of defences has been

devised such as to render Diego Suarez well-nigh impregnable. Less than two years after his arrival in Madagascar, Joffre had by hard work, ability, and an indomitable tenacity obtained results sufficient to ensure the ultimate success of the undertaking, and these valuable services so brilliantly rendered to his country were officially recognised by his promotion to the rank of Brigadier General on October 12th, 1901.

The young General—he was not yet fifty—remained at Diego Suarez so long as his presence was indispensable; he then returned to France to prepare for the gigantic struggle in which he was to play so prominent and so glorious a part.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PRESENT TASK

DURING the past twelve years General Joffre's chief care and constant preoccupation have been to prepare himself and France's army for the European conflict which his unerring foresight, common sense, and patriotism showed him to be inevitable.

On his return to France from Madagascar, he was given the command of the 19th Artillery Brigade. In July 1903 he was raised to the dignity of *Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur*, and shortly after he was appointed a member of the *Comité*

*Technique du Génie*. Then, on January 12th, 1904, he was given supreme control of the whole Corps of Engineers, being appointed *Directeur du Génie* at the War Office in Paris.

The next year, in March 1905, he was promoted to the rank of *Général de Division*, but remained at his post at the War Office until January 1906, when he took up the command of the 6th Infantry Division. Two years later, in May 1908, he was placed at the head of the 2nd Army Corps, the head-quarters of which were at Amiens; he was, besides, successively appointed *Inspecteur Général Permanent des Côtes* and *Inspecteur Permanent des Écoles Militaires*.

In July 1909 General Joffre was raised to the dignity of *Grand Officier de la Légion d'Honneur*, and was soon

afterwards appointed a member of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*, the French General Staff. At that time the supreme direction of the French Army was entrusted to the *Chef d'État-Major Général* in time of peace and to the Vice-President of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* in time of war. This duality in the supreme command was abolished in 1911; the duties and responsibilities which had hitherto been shared by the *Chef d'État-Major* and the *Vice-Président du Conseil Supérieur* were vested in one man, and that man was General Joffre.

During the three years of so-called peace, when the sands were running low and Germany's increasingly aggressive attitude gave all European Chancellories furiously to think, General Joffre has been working harder than ever before in his busy life. With un-

erring acumen and mathematical precision he had gauged the purpose and the might of Germany. He knew how unscrupulous the enemy and how terrible his great battle-axe; he knew how tremendous would be the force of the blow aimed at France's heart, and how difficult it would be to parry. He knew the full meaning of his responsibility to guard and save from the ruthless hordes of the modern Attila the sacred soil of the Republic.

With admirable power of concentration, absolute singleness of purpose, remorseless persistence, dauntless courage, and exceptional ability, General Joffre prepared France's army for the day of trial. The means placed at his disposal were altogether inadequate to the task; professional politicians heeded not his warnings; the pressing needs of national defence,



the elementary duty of safeguarding the menaced national existence, were lightly sacrificed for vote-catching utopian reforms. But never did Joffre complain, never did he allow the foul air of party politics to dull the bright mirror of his loyalty and patriotism. The more insufficient the means at his disposal, the more determined was he to make the best possible use of them, and only those who know what difficulties he had to overcome can measure his merit and the praise he deserves for the remarkable degree of efficiency of the French Army.

It is highly probable that the success which attended the general mobilisation in France was altogether beyond the hopes of the most sanguine of French military experts as well as a grievous disappointment to the German General

Staff, who all knew the magnitude, and some thought the hopelessness, of the task that awaited General Joffre.

## CHAPTER VI

### JOFFRE THE MAN

ON the eve of the battle of Omdurman, Lord Kitchener addressing the superior officers of the Expeditionary Force told them in a few words that he had safely brought them to where the Mahdi was to be routed; they had men, guns, ammunition, and supplies in plenty to do it—that had been his work, and he had done it. Their work would begin on the morrow; it would be more bloody, but it must be equally thorough.

General Joffre used different words, but expressed the same idea when speaking, some years ago, of the duties of a Commander-in-Chief in

modern warfare. He predicted that, in future, battles would be fought along fronts extending over many miles; that the part played by generals would be less brilliant and that assigned to the regimental officers more decisive than in the past. The rôle of the Commander-in-Chief he described as being to supply each part of the fighting line with as great a number of troops as the enemy was able to bring at any point, but he added that the fate of battles and the successful issue of the campaign would depend upon the initiative, the courage, and above all the endurance of individuals and of individual units.

The days of the plumed general galloping upon a prancing charger in front of his army are over. The courage and enthusiasm of the troops are just as great and invaluable as

ever before in the history of warfare, but modern science has entirely altered the channels through which courage and enthusiasm lead to victory.

Unlike the Kaiser rushing from Alsace to Galicia and from Flanders to Poland, blasting forth incessant proclamations and lavishing iron crosses, General Joffre lives at headquarters quietly and works silently. His exceptional ability for work and power of concentration are no greater than his practical common sense: he knows that the strain upon his strength and faculties will be severe and must last long; his health is an asset of immense value to France, and he treats it accordingly. Even during the opening weeks of the great war, when by sheer weight of metal and men the deep German masses were driving before them both French

and British forces in what seemed to be their victorious march upon Paris, tremendous as must have been the strain upon the Commander-in-Chief, and formidable as was the responsibility upon his shoulders, General Joffre retired to rest at his wonted hour, and those whose duty and honour it was to watch over him say that his sleep was as peaceful as a child's. Very early each morning the Generalissimo, thoroughly refreshed by a short but sound sleep, would calmly consider the problem which faced him, and then, without undue haste or loss of time, issue such orders as the situation demanded.

Free from all vanity, unassuming in his bearing, simple in his tastes, courteous, eager to praise and slow to blame, scrupulously fair and strictly just, eminently sincere and loyal, General Joffre possesses a charm of

manner which none can resist who approach him. All who know him love and trust him, and all his men know him.

When a month after war had been declared, on September 6th, the Army Order was read to the French retreating troops in which General Joffre cried "Halt!" his voice rang through the whole of the Army and made of every man a hero. During a whole fortnight, day and night, the soldiers of France had been fighting desperately upon the losing side; the foe was fast marching upon Paris, and 1870 cast its red shadow upon many ruined villages; hope was ebbing fast in anxious hearts, and faith was tottering in doubting souls; then above the thundering roar of the cannon came Joffre's bugle call "En avant!" "Now," said he to his men, "now is the time and the opportunity

to save France ; let all advance who can, let all die where they stand who cannot advance ! ” Exhausted and half dazed by fatigue, heat, and lack of food and sleep, the men halted, and three times were the words passed from mouth to mouth, from first to last rank. “ Our Joffre says : let all advance who can ; let all die where they stand who cannot advance ! ” At last Joffre had spoken, and Joffre must be obeyed ; his name alone raised the spirits of the weary, march-worn soldiery, and his message sank deep in their hearts.

The love which the French soldier bears Joffre and the blind confidence which he places in the great chief are fully deserved and amply repaid. General Joffre, too, loves and trusts his men. Never, since the day when he entered “ Polytechnique ” in 1868, has Joffre grudged anything to France.



His time and work, his whole mind and heart, have been devoted to her service and wrapped up in her; his life he many times risked and would willingly have laid down for her; honours he never sought and still less riches, but never did miser hold more lovingly, nor more jealously preserve, gold pieces in his clutches than General Joffre the lives of his men. He has never grudged France anything except the blood of her sons. Many a time since the beginning of the war must the temptation have been great for the Generalissimo to gain some brilliant advantage, to make a popular move, to "give its head" to the impetuous genius of the race: Joffre had but to say the word, but he did not say it—the price would have been too great. That generous blood which his men would have joyfully shed at his bidding he could not, would not

part with—no, not so long as there remained a chance of making a better bargain with grim Death.

Great as is General Joffre by his deeds, he is still greater by what he forebore doing; great as is his strength, his patience is greater still; great as is his intelligence, his love is greater still; and great as is the love which Joffre bears France, still greater is the love which France bears Joffre.

A. L. S.

*Christmas, 1914.*

